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ABSTRACT

This reports the results of a pilot effort to investigate how social studies teachers attempt to resolve a situation in which values conflict. Ninety-two elementary and secondary teachers randomly selected from participants in two social studies conferences were asked to describe in writing an incident in which they were faced with a dilemma. Tables present story categories assigned by teachers (decision-making justice, dissent, and equality), interpersonal involvement, the perceived antagonist, and solutions to dilemma situations. Implications drawn from the data suggest that this sample of teachers seemed unable to perceive a situation from another's viewpoint and resolved conflict by authority or avoidance. It is observed that values education materials can be of little avail if teachers are unable to perceive or understand the viewpoints and positions of others. (Author/KSM)

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TEACHER APPROACHES TO THE RESOLUTION OF VALUE CONFLICTS

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The latest "in-thing" in the social studies these days appears to be "values-education." Indeed the steadily emerging series of books and articles on the topic suggest that "valuing" may well take the place that "inquiry" held secure during the 1960's. A few curriculum materials directed toward value analysis and development have already appeared; reports indicate that many more are in the works.

It seems logical to assume that a key factor in the success of any program or materials directed toward values education lies to a considerable extent in the degree to which the teachers who use these materials are able to help students identify and clarify not only their own values, but also those of others in a wide variety of settings and cultures. The theories of Piaget and Kohlberg argue that the most fundamental change in the cognitive and moral functioning of individuals is that known as decentering - the ability to see events from another's point of view represents a change in individuals that is manifested not only in the ways by which they think, but also in the ways by which they interact with other people in short - in their social relations. Decentering in the social sense represents a gradual process of growth in differentiating one's own wishes and values from those of other people; planning for the future; and seeking to change the society in which one lives for the better.

Several studies have shown that many individuals rank very low on the scales or other response measures of Harvey (1970); DeCecco (1970); and Kohlberg (1971), all of which measure in varying degrees the ability to decenter. This paper will report the results of one such study, a pilot effort designed to investigate the question, "How do Social Studies teachers attempt to resolve a situation in whcih values conflict?"

Ninety-two teachers, representing both elementary and secondary levels, were randomly selected from among some 600 voluntarily attending two social studies conferences in the Spring of 1972, one in western Canada and the other in southern California. Those teachers selected were then asked to describe, in writing, an incident in which they were faced with a "dilemma," - that is, in which they had to choose from among two or more conflicting alternatives, and in which the "fair" or "just" thing to do was not clear. They were also asked to describe, in writing, how they resolved the issue. The instrument used was modeled after a written interview form used by DeCecco and others (1970) to interview some 7000 teenagers in junior and senior high schools of the Philadelphia and greater New York areas in the Spring of 1968 concerning contemporary social and other problems then existing withing their respective school systems. Table 1 is a copy of the instrument used:

TABLE 1
THE INTERVIEW FORM

Grade or level taught _____

Sometimes people have trouble being as "fair" or "just" as they would like to be. Sometimes a person is not sure what is the "fair" thing to do. Other times it seems as if no one can change the way things are enough to make things "fair" in a place like a school. Oftentimes there appear to be a number of things that a person might do in a given situation. In the space provided below, please describe an incident in which you have been involved or that you witnessed in which you had to choose from among two or more alternative ways of responding and in which the "fair" or "just" thing to do was not clear.

_____

_____

Please reread what you write now and check to see that you have put in something about each topic below. As you find each item, check it off in the space below. Please add to your story any items you do not already have in it.

Where it happened	( )
Who started it	( )
Who else was there	( )
What problems came up	( )
How the problems were handled	( )
How else the problems might have been handled	( )

Now: we would like to know which of the following names for problems in dealing with people fits your story best. Please put number one (1) next to the name that fits best, number two (2) next to the name that fits second best, and so on.

Your story raised problems of:

Decision-Making:	Having a voice in what rules should be made and how they should be enforced	( )
Justice	Giving a person who has been accused of something a fair chance to defend himself	( )
Dissent	Criticizing, protesting, or refusing to take part in a group	( )
Equality	Getting the same changes in life no matter what your race, religion, sex, or economic status may be.	( )

_____

The responses obtained were then analyzed and categorized as follows:

In terms of the type of dilemma perceived

All ninety-two teachers were able to assign the incidents they described to one of the specific categories shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

STORY CATEGORIES ASSIGNED BY 92 TEACHERS SELECTED RANDOMLY FROM THOSE VOLUNTARILY ATTENDING TWO SOCIAL STUDIES CONFERENCES IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES IN THE SPRING OF 1972.

Category	Number	Percentage
Decision-Making	38	41.1
Justice	24	26.0
Dissent	16	17.4
Equality	14	15.5
Totals	92	100.0%

As a check on the validity of the categorization system, an intelligent housewife with no teaching experience also read and assigned the incidents to categories. She was able to assign all the incidents to one of the four categories described in the interview form presented in Table 1. Unknown to this young lady, her assignments were in complete agreement with the teachers" categorization of their described incidents.

One thing seems clear from this first analysis. Teachers appear to have little trouble in identifying incidents in their school experience in which they were involved with or witnessed value conflict.

In terms of the ability to decenter

One aspect of the ability to decenter is represented by what DeCecco (1970) calls Interpersonal Distance. Distance represents

the degree to which the writer of an incident is personally involved or not in the incident he describes. Folowing their lead, distance in this study was operationally defined as the use of the pronouns He or They by the teachers interviewed to describe the protagonist in their incident. It was assumed that such usage (rather than I or We) represented the ability to see things from another point of view. Table 3 shows the breakdown with regard to Distance.

TABLE 3
INTERPERSONAL INVOLVEMENT OF TEACHER AND PROTAGONIST IN INCIDENT DESCRIBED (DISTANCE)

Protagonist	Number	Percentage
I or We	69	75
He or They	23	25
Totals	92	100%

As Table 3 illustrates only 25% of the incidents were described as having a distant protagonist. Most of the teachers were concerned with personal rather than distant problems.

Another aspect of decentering involves the ability of individuals to relate to larger and larger groups of people as they mature (Inhelder and Piaget, 1958). On the basis of this theoretical argument, the writer hypothesized that the teachers in this study would be more likely to describe the protagonist of thier incident as groups than as individuals. Again, following the lead of DeCecco, the proportion of individuals describing incidents in terms of We or They was taken, operationally, to represent that proportion thinking of groups rather than individuals; with the usage of I or He representing the reverse. Table 4 show the results in this regard.

TABLE 4

INTERPERSONAL INVOLVEMENT OF TEACHER AND PROTAGONIST IN INCIDENT DESCRIBED (GROUP SIZE)

Protagonist		Number	Percentage
I or He		73	79.4
We or They		19	20.6
	Totals	92	100.0%

Only 20.6% of the teachers described their incidents in terms of groups. Group issues, apparently, are less important for these teachers than individual concerns.

A third test of decentering would involve the distance between an individual and the antagonist in the incident he describes - i.e., the other party in the conflict. DeCecco (1970) referred to this dimension of interpersonal involvement as Relative Status: it was the category used to estimate the amount of social distance between the protagonist and the antagonist in an incident. Once again following this precendent, the author of this paper assumed that if the incident described by the teachers involved self, a peer, or a student as an antagonist, this would be viewed as a less distant antagonist than if the antagonist were described as someone or something (e.g., an institution)else. Involvement with more distant people would suggest an involvement with more diverse points of view. Table 5 shows the results of this analysis.

TABLE 5

PERCEIVED ANTAGONIST AS SEEN BY 92 TEACHERS SELECTED RANDOMLY FROM THOSE VOLUNTARILY ATTENDING TWO SOCIAL STUDIES CONFERENCES IN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES IN THE SPRING OF 1972 (Relative Status)

Antagonist	Number	Percentage
Student	38	41.1
Authority	23	25.0
Peers	15	16.3
Parents	7	8.0
Self	5	5.0
Institution	3	3.3
Community	1	1.1

Over 62% of the teachers described the antagonist in their incident as being themselves, their peers, or their students. These teachers, evidentally, are involved with antagonists fairly close to themselves rather than socially distant.

DeCecco (1970) used the term Personification to indicate the abstractness of the antagonist identified in an incident. He assumed, as does the present author, that involvement with larger groups. This assumption is based on another of Inhelder and Piaget's assertions (1958), namely, that as an individual matures, he is able to relate more and more to institutional structures as well as specific individuals and small groups. Table 6 shows the results here

TABLE 6

IDENTIFICATION OF ANTAGONIST AS PERSON OR INSTITUTION BY TEACHERS (PERSONIFICATION)

Antagonist	Number	Percentage
Person	88	95.6
Institution	4	4.4
Totals	92	100.0%

Identification of an institution as an antagonist could be seen as evidence of the social maturity of the describer of the incident. The results here are overwhelming in their direction - only 4.4% of the teachers made such an identification. The antagonists which these teachers identify are close to home.

In terms of the ways by which the dilemma was resolved.

The interview form shown in Table 1 asked the teachers not only to describe a dilemma in which they were involved, but also to explain how they attempted to resolve the dilemma. Their responses to this request were also analyzed and categorized in terms of the following descriptors:

Authoritative - Resolution by recourse to the authority of the writer's position as a teacher. An outright command, direct order, or flat refusal was given arbitrarily, with no attempt being made to offer any explanation or reasons for the decision.

Argumentative - Resolution by recourse to argument (though essentially one-way.) The writer still demands and expects compliance with his decision, though he attempts to give his reasons as to why he thinks his decision is appropriate.

Negotiated - Resolution by recourse to mutual discussion of

each individual's position, with some form or compromise occuring.

Capitulation - Resolution by the protagonist acceding to the antagonist's demands or position.

Avoidance - Resolution by ignoring the conflict and/or doing nothing.

Table 7 shows the results of this analysis.

TABLE 7

SOLUTIONS TO DILEMMA SITUATIONS IDENTIFIED BY TEACHERS

Solution	Number	Percentage
Authority	35	38.0
Argument	8	8.7
Negotiation	20	21.7
Capitulation	3	3.3
Avoidance	26	28.3

A total of 46.7% turned to authoritative means to resolve the dilemma in which they were involved. 28.3% tended to avoid the issue. Less than one-fourth (21.7%) tried to negotiate with the other party involved. Compromise appeared to be an approach which most of these teachers tended to avoid.

Implications

The results of this study are dismaying to say the least, for they appear to suggest rather overwhelmingly that this sample of teachers seemed, in the main, unable to perceive a situation from another's viewpoint. Most of these teachers (75%) were concerned with personal rather than distant problems. Most (79.4%) described the protagonist of their incident as an individual rather than as a

group. Over half (62%) described the antagonist in their incident as someone fairly close to themselves rather than socially distant. And almost all (95.6%) identified the antagonist in their incident as a person rather than an institution. Furthermore, less than one-fourth (21.7%) attempted to resolve the value conflict in which they were involved by recourse to negotiation. 75.0% relied either on authoritative dictums, or tried to avoid the issue entirely.

This was a fairly small sample. It is important not to overlook the fact, however, that this sample was selected from teachers voluntarily attending social studies conferences. It seems logical to view these teachers, therefore, as representing some of the most motivated and dedicated of the teacher population. The need for further studies in this regard is, of course, essential, but a sense of foreboding persists. Materials designed for value education alone, no matter how carefully or cleverly prepared they may be, will be to little avail if the teachers using those materials are themselves unable to perceive, let alone understand, the viewpoints and/or positions of others. The results of this study suggest that such perception and understanding can by no means be taken for granted.

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